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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 20 November 2014 to 3 March 2015

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the past three months, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended by subsequent resolutions, most recently resolution 2192 (2014).

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic generally was maintained, albeit in a continuously volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and despite a number of significant violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement of 1974 by Israeli and Syrian forces, which are set out below. The Syrian armed forces carried out military activities and security operations against armed groups, often in response to offensives carried out by the armed groups. Inside the area of separation, the presence of the Syrian armed forces and military equipment, as well as any other armed personnel and military equipment, other than that of UNDOF, is in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. As underscored by the Security Council in its resolution 2192 (2014), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

3. A number of significant incidents occurred on 7 December 2014 and 18 and 27 January 2015 across the ceasefire line in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. On 7 December, UNDOF personnel observed two aircraft flying from the Alpha side into the area of separation and further into the area of limitation, before losing sight of the aircraft. On 18 January, UNDOF personnel on the Alpha side observed two unmanned aerial vehicles crossing the ceasefire line from the Alpha to the Bravo side approximately 1.5 km from United Nations outpost 37B in the general direction of United Nations position 30. UNDOF personnel observed the unmanned aerial vehicles until they disappeared from their sight. Several minutes later, UNDOF observed smoke from the general direction of position 30. The UNDOF personnel could not determine the origin of the smoke, as it was on low ground relative to their location. Shortly thereafter, two unmanned

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aerial vehicles appeared in sight of the UNDOF personnel, flying westward from the general direction of position 30 and crossing the ceasefire line south of outpost 37B. Later the same day, Hizbullah alleged that Israel had conducted an airstrike on the Golan on 18 January, which killed several Hizbullah members and an Iranian military officer.

4. On 27 January, UNDOF observed one incident of firing from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line. United Nations personnel at a temporary observation post close to Camp Ziouani heard two large explosions and saw two impacts approximately 4 km west of the ceasefire line and 5 km north-west of Camp Ziouani. Several minutes later, they observed a third impact, in the Mount Hermon area, approximately 2 km south of United Nations position Hermon South in the area of limitation. United Nations personnel were approximately 400 m from the location where the rocket landed and had to evacuate the area. The point of origin of the fire could not be seen. Subsequently, United Nations personnel at United Nations observation post 73 observed the firing of 18 artillery rounds from an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) battery of 155 mm artillery deployed south of the observation post. IDF informed UNDOF that the point of origin of the fire had been a position north of Camp Faoaur and that IDF had directed its fire at this location. UNDOF restricted its movements at Camp Ziouani to a minimum and stopped all movements north of the camp in the direction of Majdal Shams. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate informed UNDOF that "terrorists" had fired several rockets from an area west of Harfa, a village approximately 3 km north of Camp Faouar, into the occupied Golan, intending to cause further deterioration of the situation on the Golan. He indicated that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic was planning to strike against the "terrorists" and emphasized that they were the only target. The acting UNDOF Force Commander conveyed this information to IDF and urged utmost restraint in order not to escalate the situation further. On 28 January, after midnight, IDF carried out an airstrike on two Syrian armed forces locations in the area of limitation, one in Al Wisyah, approximately 3 km south of Camp Faouar, and a second east of the village of Jaba, destroying two artillery positions. UNDOF personnel observed heavy anti-aircraft fire from areas east and north of Khan Arnabeh. The acting Force Commander once more urged IDF to use utmost restraint to prevent the situation from escalating further. No injuries or damage was reported to UNDOF from the impacts on the Alpha side or from the subsequent artillery fire onto the Bravo side.

5. Crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians, primarily shepherds, was observed by United Nations personnel on an almost daily basis. After the issuance of my previous report, UNDOF observed one occasion in November and several in January and February when armed individuals crossed the ceasefire line, approached the technical fence and at times interacted with IDF across the ceasefire line in the vicinity of United Nations observation posts 51 and 54. In some instances, wounded individuals were handed over from the Bravo side to the Alpha side. During the evening of 20 January, in the area north of observation post 54, UNDOF observed two trucks crossing from the Bravo side to the Alpha side, where they were received by IDF personnel. The trucks were loaded with sacks before returning to the Bravo side. On at least four occasions in February, United Nations personnel at observation post 54 saw vehicles, including small trucks, crossing the ceasefire line from the Bravo side and approaching the technical fence. On one such occasion, several vehicles, including some with anti-aircraft guns mounted on the

back, were seen parked next to the technical fence. Owing to the terrain, UNDOF could not observe whether interaction between individuals on the Alpha and the Bravo sides took place.

6. UNDOF protested all firing across the ceasefire line to the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate and IDF. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line, as well as the crossing by individuals of the ceasefire line, are violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

7. In employing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed by the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, UNDOF reports all breaches of the ceasefire line. During the incident of 27 January and the immediate aftermath, the acting Force Commander was in ongoing close contact with both parties to the Disengagement Agreement to prevent an escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line.

8. UNDOF observed and reported instances of transborder movements of unidentified individuals between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in the northern part of the area of separation.

9. In the context of the Syrian internal conflict, the areas of Jabbata, Trunje and Ufaniyah in the northern part of the area of separation remained relatively quiet, despite the end late in August of a local truce arrangement when extremist armed groups from the southern part of the area of separation had linked up with armed members of the opposition in Jabbata. In the central part of the area of separation, the situation remained largely unchanged. Heavy fighting took place between Syrian armed forces and armed groups in the area south of Al Baath and Khan Arnabeh on 24 and 25 December when the Syrian armed forces repelled an attack by the armed groups. In the course of the fighting on 24 and 25 December, UNDOF observed 43 artillery impacts in the area of United Nations observation post 56. Syrian armed forces continued to fire on armed members of the opposition in the areas of Jaba and Um Batinah, adjacent to the area of separation. Small-scale attacks by the Syrian armed forces against areas controlled by armed groups took place on several occasions during the second half of January in the general area of Masharah in the area of limitation. Armed groups continued to exercise control of most of the southern parts of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. The Syrian armed forces targeted these areas with direct fire. Late in November and towards the end of January, the Syrian armed forces also used airstrikes in the southern part of the area of limitation; in the latter instance, this occurred during an attack by armed groups in areas east of the UNDOF area of operations, around Ash Sheikh Maskeen.

10. Starting on 8 February, the Syrian armed forces launched a large-scale operation against armed groups in an area east and north-east of Khan Arnabeh and south of the main road to Damascus, gaining control of several villages and hilltops that had been controlled by the armed groups during the past months. The operation extended to the areas along two main roads linking Damascus with Quneitra and Dara'a. Syrian authorities acknowledged to UNDOF that the operation by the Syrian armed forces was carried out with "Syria's allies". After a lull in the fighting, most probably due to adverse weather conditions, the Syrian armed forces resumed their offensive on 22 February. That day, UNDOF observed 15 airstrikes conducted by the Syrian armed forces in the UNDOF area of operations east of United Nations position 80. Throughout the day, UNDOF observed approximately 300 civilians in

total, mostly women and children, from the areas affected by the airstrikes move farther west into the area of separation in the vicinity of United Nations positions and the Israeli technical fence. After the air campaign ended, the individuals moved back east in the direction of their villages. The following day, while shelling continued, around 150 civilians, mostly women and children, moved into the vicinity of position 80.

11. Several incidents that jeopardized United Nations personnel and positions occurred. On 24 November, an exchange of fire took place between members of different armed groups in the vicinity of United Nations position 80. Several stray bullets passed over the position. On 27 November, United Nations personnel at position 80 once again observed an exchange of fire between members of different armed groups approximately 1 km from the position. On 24 December, United Nations personnel at observation post 54 observed approximately 35 armed persons waving weapons in front of the observation post and firing shots into the air. On 23 January, personnel at United Nations observation post 51 went into the shelter after an artillery shell landed approximately 500 m from the observation post.

12. On 18 and 22 December and 23 January, United Nations personnel at observation post 51 observed a white armoured vehicle with United Nations markings moving in the area of Al Qahtaniyah. On 22 December, personnel at observation post 54 observed a white pickup truck with an anti-aircraft gun mounted on the back that is likely to have been a stolen United Nations vehicle. As also reported in my 22 January 2015 report on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/48), on 7 December 2014 a stolen UNDOF vehicle was used in Dar'a as a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

13. During the reporting period, the Syrian armed forces maintained their positions in the area of separation, in particular in the urban centres of Al Baath and Khan Arnabeh and along the main road connecting Quneitra to Damascus, where they reinforced their presence with tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery weapons, in addition to some locations in the area of limitation. The Syrian armed forces generally deployed three tanks in the area of separation, including at their position at Tal al-Kurum, and several others in locations in the area of limitation adjacent to the area of separation. On various occasions, UNDOF observed a total of three tanks in the areas of Tal al-Garbi and Al Qahtaniyah, which were controlled by armed groups.

14. UNDOF protested the presence of Syrian armed forces and equipment in the area of separation, and the firing into and inside the area of separation. The Force Commander reiterated to the Syrian authorities the obligation of the Syrian armed forces to halt military operations in the area of separation and to cease firing from the area of limitation, stressing the importance of abiding by the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and ensuring the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground. Senior United Nations officials have conveyed similar messages to the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations.

15. During the reporting period, UNDOF observed three tented camps housing internally displaced persons, two camps in the vicinity of United Nations position 80 and one in a wooded area in the vicinity of Kudnaa in the area of limitation. Approximately 1 km north of the position, in the vicinity of Al Aishah village,

UNDOF observed 26 tents housing approximately 150 persons. In a second location north-west of Al Aishah village, straddling the ceasefire line, UNDOF observed 20 large and 15 smaller tents housing approximately 180 individuals. Two tents were observed in the vicinity of Kudnaa; the number of individuals staying there is not known. Owing to the continued closure of the established crossing between the Alpha and Bravo sides late in August, UNDOF is currently not in a position to facilitate, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, humanitarian crossings, including for students, between the Alpha and the Bravo sides.

16. Since the temporary relocation of UNDOF from a number of its positions on the Bravo side in mid-September, and as mentioned in my previous report (S/2014/859), UNDOF, in consultation with the parties, continued to review the situation in the area of separation. The ultimate goal for UNDOF is to return fully to the area of separation when the situation permits. In this connection, UNDOF assessed the prevailing security situation in the area of separation and determined that the conditions are not conducive to a return of the Force to the positions it vacated.

17. In its current configuration, UNDOF has continued to carry out its mandate by maintaining the visibility of the area of separation and the ceasefire line, albeit limited, from a number of positions it continues to hold in the area of separation. The Force continued to maintain four positions on Mount Hermon in the northern part of the area of separation and position 80 in the southern part, as well as position 22 on the Alpha side. On Mount Hermon, UNDOF conducts foot and vehicle patrols twice daily. UNDOF operations continued to be supported by the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) military observers in Observer Group Golan, who maintained five fixed and four temporary observation posts on the Alpha side. The focus of Observer Group Golan activities remained on around-the-clock static observation, investigations and situational analysis. Through Observer Group Golan, UNDOF continued to carry out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied Observer Group Golan inspection teams. Inspections and mobile operations in the area of limitation on the Bravo side remained suspended because of the security situation. As in the past, the Force faced restrictions on freedom of movement, and its inspection teams were denied access to some positions on the Alpha side. Observer Group Golan members continued to experience restrictions of movement on the Alpha side when entering and exiting United Nations observation post 73, which is located east of the Israeli technical fence. UNDOF peacekeepers remained deployed at observation posts 54 and 73 to enhance protection of the military observers.

18. During the reporting period, IDF deployed the Iron Dome defence system between 3 and 10 February and on one occasion a multiple-launch rocket system, in addition to maintaining the intermittent presence of 155 mm artillery on the Alpha side within 10 km of the ceasefire line.

19. In its efforts to ensure that it continues to implement its mandate effectively, UNDOF continued to engage the parties on the practical arrangements to be put in place to establish an interim configuration that will allow it to maintain the ceasefire, continue to monitor, verify and report on violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, and exercise its critical liaison functions with the parties,

particularly with a view to preventing an escalation of incidents. The mission headquarters, comprising the Office of the Head of Mission and Force Commander with his advisory staff and security detail as well as some mission support functions, has been established in Damascus. A suitable logistics site has been identified in a location near Damascus and discussions with the Syrian authorities are in progress for UNDOF to gain use of the facility.

20. Discussions with the parties continue with respect to procedures for crossing between the Alpha and the Bravo sides in the absence of the established crossing at Quneitra. UNDOF continues to engage with the parties on the use of technology to offset the loss of situational awareness in the area of separation. In addition, discussions with the Alpha side continue with respect to additional locations required to establish temporary United Nations positions for observing the ceasefire line from the Alpha side.

21. UNDOF continued to focus on contingency planning for the reinforcement and evacuation of United Nations positions and observation posts. UNDOF, through its Force reserve company, also conducted regular exercises and training. The company remains in two UNDOF locations, Camp Ziouani and position 80. UNDOF strengthened the Mount Hermon positions by augmenting the troop strength and force protection. In addition, the mission has identified the need to reinforce position 12 in the Mount Hermon area and to strengthen the UNDOF presence in that location.

22. Movement of UNDOF personnel on the Bravo side remains limited. UNDOF continues to resupply the positions on Mount Hermon from Damascus. Convoys between Damascus and the Mount Hermon positions to ensure the resupply as well as maintenance of the positions are conducted several times per week in armoured vehicles and with UNDOF security escort.

23. As at 22 February, UNDOF comprised 789 troops, including 32 women, from Fiji (301), India (190), Ireland (138), Nepal (158) and the Netherlands (2). In addition, 67 military observers from UNTSO, including one woman, assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks. On 9 February, as part of the reconfiguration of the Force, 146 troops of the Fijian contingent redeployed to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

24. The Security Council, when deciding in its resolution 2131 (2013) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2014, called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973) and requested the Secretary-General to submit, at the end of the period, a report on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/69/341), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 69/24 on Jerusalem and 69/25 on the Syrian Golan.

25. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict is further reducing the prospects for their resumption and progress towards peace between Israel and the

Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

IV. Observations

26. I note with concern the serious violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that have taken place. The firing from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line as well as IDF responses with artillery fire and airstrikes jeopardize the long-term ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. It remains critical that both sides maintain liaison with UNDOF in the first instance to prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line. The mission's liaison with the parties contributed to the de-escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line on 27 and 28 January. The mandate of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring the stability of the region. For its part, the United Nations will spare no effort in ensuring that the long-held ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continues to hold.

27. I remain deeply concerned about the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and its potential implications for the stability of the region. The presence of the Syrian armed forces and unauthorized military equipment in the area of separation are grave violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. The increased use of heavy weapons by both the Syrian armed forces and armed groups in the continuing Syrian conflict, including air power by Government forces in the area of limitation on the Bravo side, including in the vicinity of the area of separation, is disturbing. There should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. I note with concern the presence and use of tanks by the Syrian armed forces and, in increasing number, by the armed groups in the area of separation. I call upon all parties to the Syrian conflict to cease military actions throughout the country, including in the UNDOF area of operations. I call upon all parties to take all measures necessary to protect civilians. I also urge the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to stop the use of airstrikes, which cause suffering to the civilian population and destroy its livelihoods. I reiterate that all military activities in the area of separation conducted by any actor pose a risk to the ceasefire and to the local civilian population, in addition to the United Nations personnel on the ground.

28. The situation has continued to significantly affect the UNDOF area of operations. Armed opposition groups and other armed groups continue to maintain control over significant sections of the area of separation and remain present along the section of the main road connecting the two UNDOF camps. The established crossing between the Alpha and the Bravo sides remains closed. It is critical that countries with influence continue to strongly convey to the armed groups in the UNDOF area of operations the need to cease any actions that jeopardize the safety and security of United Nations personnel and to accord United Nations personnel the freedom to carry out their mandate safely and securely. Any hostile act against United Nations personnel, including threatening their physical safety, restricting their movement and direct and indirect firing at United Nations personnel and facilities by anyone, is unacceptable.

29. The primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side rests with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The safety and security of United Nations personnel must be ensured.

30. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and the presence of UNDOF. I call on both parties to continue to assist UNDOF in achieving its interim configuration in structure and deployment to ensure that the mission is in a position to effectively implement its mandate, until such time as the security situation allows the Force to return fully to the area of separation. I note the assistance provided by Israel and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in facilitating the provision of essential supplies in support of the Force.

31. It is equally critical that the Security Council continue to bring its influence to bear on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate freely. It is essential that UNDOF continue to have at its disposal all necessary means and resources that will allow it to return to the area of separation as the situation permits.

32. UNDOF also needs to retain the confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries. I am grateful to the Governments of Fiji, India, Ireland, Nepal and the Netherlands for their contributions to UNDOF and for staying the course under these extremely trying circumstances. In addition, I am grateful to the Member States contributing military observers to UNTSO. The continued credible presence of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring stability on the Golan and in the region.

33. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to Lieutenant General Iqbal Singh Singha, who completed his tour of duty on 2 January, for his dedication and leadership of UNDOF over the past two and half years, during a difficult period for the mission. I also wish to express appreciation to the military and civilian personnel serving in UNDOF and the military observers in Observer Group Golan, who continue to perform with efficiency and commitment, under extremely challenging circumstances, the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I have full confidence that UNDOF will continue to use its best efforts to carry out its mandate under the leadership of Major General Purna Chandra Thapa.